



US 8 Environmental Impact Statement Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

February 26, 2003



1. What is happening on US 8?

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation is in the middle of a four-year corridor study that will result in an Environmental Impact Statement for the study corridor beginning at WIS 35 north and extending 40 miles to US 53. The purpose of the study is to provide for safer, more convenient travel. At this point in the study, alternatives are being developed, public input sought and environmental studies continue. The project study team includes consultants from Strand Associates, SEH and EMCS.

2. Why is the proposed project taking so long?

The US 8 corridor was selected for study in December 2000. Work in the year 2001 was spent identifying the project needs. This was accomplished through agency meetings, public meetings, traffic and roadway analysis, and crash analysis. In 2002 and continuing into 2003, conceptual alternatives were developed to address the transportation needs. The alternatives were presented to the public for comment on February 20, 2003. Refinement of alternatives will follow and a draft of the EIS document will be presented for comment. The final EIS document will be produced at the end of 2004.

3. Who will make the final decision on which alternative will be built? What are the criteria for selecting the preferred alternative?

The EIS is a disclosure document. It details the process through which the proposed transportation project was developed, along with potential impacts resulting from the project. WisDOT will make a decision on what is the preferred alternative; however, this does not commit the proposed project to proceed to further action. For that, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) must issue a Record of Decision (ROD). It is important to note that public comment is a major factor considered in reaching a final decision, as is the input of other involved state and federal agencies.

The EIS process will identify issues of concern. Issue identification is accomplished by an extensive public campaign and detailed research into existing conditions in the study area. Information is gathered and items such as farms and neighborhoods, parks, wetlands, major utilities, streams and their floodplains, cemeteries, historic structures and districts, schools, hospitals, railroads, airports, and habitat for threatened or endangered species are located.

Using the above information, teams of planners and engineers design alternatives that meet the identified need while avoiding, when possible, the adverse impacts to the human and natural environment.

4. Where can I see maps of the areas potentially affected by this proposed project?

Exhibits and handouts were presented at the February 20, 2003, public meeting. A local contact, Mark Kohler of SEH, (715) 236-4000, will also be available locally to meet with citizens. He will have copies of the maps from the public meeting.

Information and maps will also be available on the project Web site:

www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/d8/eis/index.htm

5. Is money available to build the roadway?

At this point funding has not been secured for actual roadway improvements. The earliest the US 8 EIS will be presented to the Transportation Projects Commission (TPC) is in fall of 2004. The TPC has the responsibility of considering whether the project should be recommended for enumeration (funding) by the State Legislature. When a study is enumerated, engineering and right-of-way acquisition may proceed and be followed by construction. With the current transportation budget tightening, there are many corridor projects that will be competing for enumeration dollars in 2004 and beyond. When US 8 is enumerated, construction could begin within six years.

6. When might the earliest construction work begin?

There are a number of major projects that were considered by the TPC in 2002, but the TPC delayed action on recommending any enumeration funding. These projects will likely be considered again in 2004. As a result, the TPC may not consider the US 8 corridor until 2006. Based on the TPC schedule for project reviews and funding levels for projects already underway, if the TPC recommends enumeration for US 8, the Department of Transportation believes that 2012 is the earliest time construction on a portion of US 8 could begin.

7. Which segment of the proposed project will be built first?

At this point in the study, it is difficult to predict which segment would be built first. One of the items WisDOT will consider includes the prioritization of needs along the 40-mile corridor. Also, building a segment with no logical connection to the existing system is less desirable than constructing a segment that has a connection to what exists and would immediately improve the traffic pattern and flow. Public opinion on this issue is also a factor in this decision.

8. If WisDOT must acquire my house, business, or farm in order to complete the project, what will happen to me, and when?

Decisions on what property WisDOT must acquire for right-of-way cannot be made at this time, because final alignments have not been selected. However, at the end of this study, and with the recommendation of the TPC for project enumeration and with a segment of US 8 prioritized as needing immediate improvement known and approved, detailed design engineering will begin. Once detailed engineering is underway, the project team will have a better idea of the actual road design and alignment.

Based on the conditions discussed above, and assuming a construction start in 2012, relocation acquisitions in a prioritized segment would be confirmed by 2009. If you have questions about WisDOT's policies on property acquisition or relocations, WisDOT's real estate specialist, Karen Rask, (715) 392-7931, is available to answer your questions.

9. I've heard the road will be an expressway or a freeway. What is the difference and how will each affect our community?

The major difference between an expressway and a freeway is that a freeway has no access points other than at interchanges (usually spaced no closer than 1 to 3 miles apart). All roads that cross a freeway must be via overpass or underpass. An expressway can have at-grade intersections.

During the conceptual alternative development, local access is a major concern. WisDOT and the study team will work with local officials to decide which roads will have direct access, and which will have to use either frontage roads or access the new road by means of those roads that do have access. Community input will be taken into consideration in making such decisions.

**10. I was not able to attend the public meetings. How can my opinions be heard?
How can I obtain more information?**

Your thoughts and comments on the proposed US 8 project are very important. Public comments are a major factor considered in reaching a final decision, as is the input of other involved state and federal agencies. We encourage you to attend the public hearings and participate in the process.

A public hearing will be held midsummer 2004, once the Draft EIS has been made available for review and prior to completion of the final EIS.

The US 8 project Web site (www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/d8/eis/index.htm) contains information regarding project status, scheduled public meetings or hearings, and maps. Project contact information is also included on the Web site.

Please note that the US 8 Web site is a dynamic site, meaning that it will periodically be updated with new information. We encourage frequent review of the site, and urge you to inform your friends and neighbors of its availability.

11. At the public information meetings, why don't you have a group question and answer session instead of breaking up into small groups for discussion?

Through experience, we have found this open forum format to be the most beneficial to the greatest number of people. The intention of the public information meeting is to disseminate information of general interest, and then present an opportunity for people to ask specific questions in a more personal atmosphere. Public speaking and microphones intimidate some people. Others are reluctant or sometimes embarrassed to publicly express their concerns or questions.

The chosen format generally produces the greatest amount of constructive feedback. People are allowed to ask questions of a project team member in a one-on-one setting and receive a detailed response. This format also permits the opportunity for more questions to be asked, and to receive input that is more direct, in the allotted time.